

Book Reviews

Dictionary of Medical Ethics. Edited by A S Duncan, G R Dunstan, and R B Welbourn. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981. Pp 459. Price £12.50.

The Hippocratic oath embodies the code of ethics which has governed the practice of medicine for centuries, and until recently its simple tenets provided a sufficient guide to medical conduct. The accelerating advances in medical science have vastly increased what is medically possible, but in so doing they have raised new ethical problems. With finite resources a selection may now have to be made as to which patient shall be given the benefit of an advance, as in haemodialysis and renal transplantation in kidney failure. The prolongation of life by extraordinary methods and the treatment of babies born with major congenital abnormalities also provide examples where ethical decisions now have to be taken which could hardly have been foreseen a few decades ago. At governmental level choices have to be made how available resources shall be allocated and these may also involve ethical decisions.

The need for a guide to this increasingly complex subject, which concerns every branch of medicine, is clear; that this book has answered the need is shown by the appearance of a much enlarged edition only four years after its original publication. It takes the form of a series of articles by 148 eminent contributors drawn from medical and other fields. The entries are arranged alphabetically with cross-references to related subjects and many include selected references. In general they provide a concise exposition of the clinical background of a subject and a dispassionate consideration of the ethical problems it may present. A number of declarations by inter-

national bodies are included, such as the Declaration of Helsinki.

Medicine is sometimes charged with becoming increasingly impersonal because the simple doctor-patient relationship may be obscured by the very size of the team providing health care. This book may help to redress the balance and emphasise the central importance of the patient. It can be recommended to all those concerned with providing health care, be they doctors, paramedical staff, or administrators. By present day standards it is cheap for its size and content and is well worth a place in departmental libraries.

A E Wilkinson

Non-gonococcal Urethritis and Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases of Public Health Importance: Report of a WHO Scientific Group. WHO Technical Report Series No 660, 1981. Geneva: WHO (available at HMSO, London). Pp 142. Sw Frs 9.

In November 1978 a study group of 22 members, including six from the USA and three from the United Kingdom, met in Geneva with Dr K K Holmes as chairman and Dr P-A Mårdh of Sweden as rapporteur. If the period of gestation of its report has been long, the offspring is decidedly bonny.

This excellent volume reviews the expanding spectrum of the sexually transmitted diseases and considers in depth infections caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis*, genital herpes and associated infections, sexually transmitted hepatitis B, infections caused by *Ureaplasma urealyticum* and *Mycoplasma hominis* and those due to cytomegalovirus, trichomoniasis, Donovanosis (granuloma inguinale),

and non-gonococcal urethritis; all are given chapters succinctly summarising the current status, which will be very useful for reference purposes. *Haemophilis vaginalis* infection, genital warts, ectoparasites, sexually transmitted enteric agents, and group B streptococcal infection are less emphasised in a brief four-page chapter.

For the reader, perhaps the most valuable are the 35 pages devoted to epididymitis, vulvovaginitis, cervicitis and urethritis in women, genital ulcers, and pelvic inflammatory disease together with the summary statements on infertility and maternal and infant morbidity in relation to sexually transmitted diseases.

Commendable features of the report are the informative tables summarising the differential diagnosis of genital ulcers and the laboratory procedures used in diagnosis; the flow charts describing the clinical evaluation of men with symptoms of urethritis; and the approach to the patient with atraumatic unilateral scrotal pain or swelling, which is especially valuable not only for those seeking guidance but also for teaching purposes.

This highly practical approach is followed in the concluding five brief summary annexes. These are concerned with drug regimens recommended for sexually transmitted diseases (including syphilis and gonorrhoea) and the management of urethritis, vulvovaginitis and cervicitis, genital ulcers, and acute salpingitis in peripheral clinics with and without a microscope or serological facilities and in intermediate and central clinics.

This report should be obtained by all who are concerned with the management of these diseases; at the cost of only £2.50, it is extremely good value.

R R Willcox